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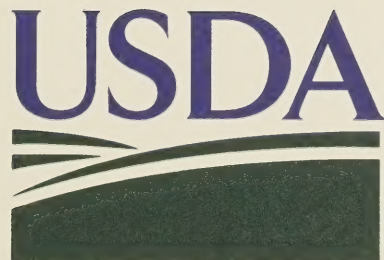


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Toward a More Sustainable American Agriculture

A Report of the USDA Interagency
Sustainable Agriculture Working Group

August 1996



United States
Department of
Agriculture



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INTRODUCTION

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro focused on the sustainability of the world's natural resources and highlighted the need to link environmental stewardship and economic development. Throughout the world, there are many instances where human-wrought pressures have resulted in environmental degradation through processes such as soil erosion and chemical runoff. Compounding this situation, we add about 90 million people to the global population every year — mostly in developing countries — while the U.S. population increases by 3 million each year.¹ Within the next 40 years, the world's population is anticipated to reach 9 billion, resulting in a doubling of food consumption. This raises huge challenges for policy makers as they seek to reconcile the needs and aspirations of a growing population with the limitations imposed by renewable and nonrenewable natural resources. For agriculture, the challenge remains to increase production and efficiency without compromising the productivity of the resource base or environmental quality.

In 1993, the President's Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD) began working to craft a national sustainability strategy for the United States. The 1987 United Nations Brundtland Report's definition of sustainable development was adopted as the starting point: *"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."* The March 1996 PCSD report, "Sustainable America - A New Consensus," speaks to the importance of the USDA's role in sustaining the production of agricultural goods and services, as well as the productivity and quality of the natural resource base and the economic and social vitality of rural communities.

American agriculture plays a large role in meeting the world's demand for food and fiber. Farm markets and products now account for nearly 16 percent of U.S. employment and the amount of land dedicated to agriculture-related purposes in the U.S. (excluding Alaska) is 48 percent.² However, American agriculture is in transition. Although total cropland has remained nearly constant since 1945, much prime farmland has been converted to urban and other non-farm uses. The number of farms has declined by about 30 percent during the past 25 years, while the average farm size has increased by 28 percent, resulting in a drastic reduction in the number of farm families. Agriculture has also had some unintended consequences on environmental quality. Soil erosion threatens long-term agricultural productivity, and causes off-site damage estimated at \$2-8 billion annually. Agricultural practices are listed as a major or minor contributor to water quality problems in 72% of river miles due to siltation and nutrient runoff.³

¹ "Making Development Sustainable: From Concepts to Action" Environmentally Sustainable Development Occasional Paper Series No. 2, The World Bank, Washington DC. 1994.

² "Sustainable America - A New Consensus" President's Council on Sustainable Development. Council on Environmental Quality, Washington DC. 1996.

³ Agricultural Resources and Environmental Indicators. USDA Economic Research Service. Agricultural Handbook #705. Washington, DC.

The Concept of Sustainable Agriculture

Both producers and consumers have become increasingly concerned with maintaining the wealth of our natural resource base, while continuing to meet society's needs for affordable food and fiber. As an important partner of the agricultural community, it is essential that the USDA administer governmental policies and programs that best foster the long-term sustainability of agriculture. The 1990 Farm Bill defines sustainable agricultural systems as integrated systems that: (1) satisfy human food and fiber needs; (2) enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends; (3) make the most use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources, and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls; (4) sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and (5) enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole. Although many other definitions of sustainable agriculture have been put forth, most definitions include the consideration of economic, environmental, and social goals.

Accommodating society's escalating demands for agricultural goods and services necessitates that at any point in time a wide variety of production systems will be needed. This portfolio of approaches ranges across a continuum from highly specialized, intensive cropping systems that include the use of substantial amounts of purchased inputs, such as synthetic nutrients and pesticides, to other production systems, such as organic, that depend predominantly on farm-produced resources and integrated management techniques. Current trends find Americans seeking a greater diversity of agricultural goods produced through a variety of production methods; for example, sales of organic products have risen at a rate estimated at 20 percent or more per year.

The sustainable agriculture concept suggests guiding principles for management, rather than dictating a specific set of acceptable production practices. Our nation's movement toward a more sustainable agriculture needs to include the development of integrated whole-farm and whole-ranch system approaches that balance the long-term environmental, economic, and social implications of agricultural practices.

Although much more effort is needed, the USDA has already responded by instituting several initiatives, such as with integrated pest management and water quality, that move us toward a more sustainable agriculture. Recognizing a need for a variety of approaches, Congress authorized and funded, via the 1985 and 1990 Farm Bills, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program and the Organic Foods Production Act, which have helped establish a base to move toward a more sustainable agriculture. The Conservation Reserve Program, authorized in the 1985 Farm Bill, has reduced cropland soil erosion by 700 million tons of soil per year, which is a reduction in cropland erosion of 22% compared to pre-CRP levels.⁴ Reduced erosion not only helps sustain long-term productivity of the land, but also protects streams and aquatic populations.

However, USDA efforts related to sustainable agriculture largely remain fragmented, as noted in a 1992 U.S. General Accounting Office report to Congress:

“...Sustainable agriculture programs are managed by a number of under and assistant secretaries with no single entity charged with overseeing or coordinating the entire issue...In addition, USDA currently has no official policy on sustainable agriculture to focus these efforts, which has resulted in some programs within USDA having conflicting goals.”

⁴Agricultural Resources and Environmental Indicators. USDA Economic Research Service. Agricultural Handbook #705. Washington, DC.

Working Group Process

In August 1995, a USDA Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SAWG) was established and charged with identifying barriers to and opportunities for improving the USDA's policies and programs to support greater agricultural sustainability in the United States. Barriers and opportunities were discussed in the context of how USDA policies, attitudes, and programs can better support agricultural producers wanting to enhance the sustainability of their production systems.⁵

Represented by various agencies and offices throughout the USDA (Appendix A), the SAWG held seven meetings during the fall of 1995 (Appendix B). Comprised of USDA staff with expertise in commodity programs, rural development, conservation, research, extension, marketing, forestry, and economics, the Working Group participated in educational workshops that featured a variety of producers from across the nation who use alternative production systems. Additional activities included a tour of farms and research centers in Maryland and meetings with researchers and USDA employees (a summary of these presentations and discussions are included in Appendix C). The SAWG divided into task groups to summarize what was heard and to develop recommendations to address barriers and opportunities to sustainable agriculture. A writing committee consolidated the task group efforts into the six areas discussed in this report:

- Commitment Statement
- Cultural and Social Issues
- Institutional Issues
- Economics and Marketing Issues
- Research Issues
- Communication and Outreach Issues

Each section of the report provides a summary of findings, followed by recommendations to be considered for immediate action and others requiring more information through a feasibility study.

It is important to note that SAWG participants found a shared understanding and willingness to cooperate that spanned divisional and ideological boundaries. The systems orientation of sustainable agriculture discussions is reflected in the way the SAWG was organized and operated. The group relied heavily on resources and people outside USDA, then worked in a true spirit of partnership to summarize all of the information into a single document. Many participants observed that this feeling of partnership and cooperation across a number of different agencies involving a variety of expertise embodies one of the essential principles of sustainable agriculture.

The challenge ahead for the USDA is to meld the goal of production efficiency with the goals of resource enhancement, community development, and farm profitability. Although not intended to be a totally complete approach to sustainability, this report enumerates a variety of ways for USDA to link its clientele, programs, goals and expertise to support agricultural activities that are sustainable in every dimension — economically, environmentally, and socially. The result would be progress toward a collection of integrated system approaches that ensure future productivity, enhance the natural resource and community base upon which agriculture depends, and improve the quality of life for all citizens.

⁵An inventory of USDA programs relevant to sustainable agriculture was compiled as part of the Working Group process and is available from the Office of Sustainable Agriculture Programs, USDA South Building Room 3868, Ag Box 2223, Washington, DC 20250-2223.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. A USDA Commitment to Sustainability

Findings:

Agriculture provides many of the goods and services essential to human livelihoods and aspirations, and helps society adapt to changing needs and circumstances. Today, a rapidly expanding population places ever-increasing demands on agricultural goods and services. As knowledge and technology continue to change agriculture, the interrelationships between people, the economy, and the land grow increasingly vital. These connections highlight the need to find a lasting balance between the economic, environmental and social components of agriculture. This need for balance underlies the central challenge of sustainability. Meeting this challenge is essential if the USDA is to be a successful partner in sustaining the people and productivity associated with U.S. agriculture.

This report primarily examines the relationship of USDA policies and programs to sustainable agriculture. However, because sustainability concepts are relevant to all of the USDA mission areas, the sustainable agriculture approaches described here cross over to USDA efforts in sustainable development, which include sustainable forestry and sustainable rural communities. Consequently, although most of the findings and recommendations in this report are specific to sustainable agriculture, some are more broad and therefore relate to USDA's overall efforts in sustainable development across mission areas.

Recommendation:

The SAWG recommends that USDA adopt the following statement on sustainability:

USDA is committed to working toward the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of diverse food, fiber, agriculture, forest, and range systems. USDA will balance goals of production and profitability, stewardship of the natural resource base and ecological systems, and enhancement of the vitality of rural communities. USDA will integrate these goals into its policies and programs, particularly through interagency collaboration, partnerships, and outreach.

II. Cultural and Social Issues

Findings:

In agriculture, as in other areas of society, social and cultural change occurs more slowly than technological change, both institutionally and individually. Many factors influence the adoption rate for sustainable agriculture practices. Some producers fear significant economic risks if they move toward more sustainable production systems. Businesses and community leaders may be skeptical because they may perceive that adoption of more sustainable technologies decreases agribusiness sales. Compounding these misconceptions is a lack of understanding and appreciation by a predominantly urban/suburban society about agriculture and quality of life issues important to rural Americans. Finally, the American public is accustomed to and expects low-cost food and fiber. Artificially low costs contribute to increased hidden food costs borne by society as a whole because of the use of nonrenewable resources and the cost of off-site environmental degradation.

Positive influences for change come from many sources. The global marketplace, changing consumer preferences, changing technologies, evolving financial practices, and management practices all help shape U.S. agriculture. While USDA is only one player in the complex agricultural world, the collaborative role USDA plays in this highly dynamic environment makes its actions uniquely influential. From workshop presenters, the Working Group heard of the need to review existing programs in terms of the incentives or disincentives they present to sustainable agriculture; include innovative farmers and ranchers in program and policy development; and offer recognition and reward programs for agricultural innovation.

Recommendations:

For immediate action:

A. Establish a “Secretary’s Sustainable Agriculture Award” to be presented annually to an individual or group of producers who demonstrate a commitment to farming and ranching technologies that contribute to the long-term sustainability of American agriculture. Nominations would be solicited from a wide variety of farming and ranching organizations.

B. Promote USDA employee and program acceptance of sustainable agriculture by: 1) directing agencies to review and revise mission area goals and strategic plans, mandated by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), to incorporate the concepts of sustainable development; 2) conducting training programs in sustainability concepts for USDA employees at all levels (such training programs would promote understanding of the total range of USDA stakeholders and clientele); and 3) incorporating interagency cooperation as an

element in performance standards for executives, administrators and program managers (see also recommendation C under Institutional Issues).

Need feasibility study:

C. Establish local community action teams to 1) promote coordination of proposed individual agency actions at the local level; 2) promote greater understanding and acceptance of the principles and practices of sustainable agriculture; and 3) serve as contact points for a coordinated delivery of USDA technical and financial assistance. These teams could be comprised of the heads of USDA agencies in local communities or by designees with expertise in sustainability.

D. Develop an urban/suburban/rural cultural exchange program to foster greater understanding between consumers and those who produce food and fiber. This program could have a point person in the Washington,

D.C., office of one of the Department's Under Secretaries. This person could coordinate state-level programs to connect youth and adults who would like to visit or work on farms or ranches with farmers willing to serve as hosts. To promote an increase of young people in farming, this program also could link those desiring farming careers with farm and ranch owners. (The program could be modeled after the "Land Link" program initiated by the Center for Rural Affairs.)

E. Establish a team of rural sociologists, anthropologists, economists and agricultural researchers to develop analytical frameworks that incorporate environmental, economic and social costs in calculating risks and benefits of sustainable production systems. These analytical tools would benefit policy makers in assessing sustainable agriculture options.

III. Institutional Issues

Findings:

Farm policy has historically promoted maximum production of a limited number of agricultural commodities rather than alternative approaches. Growing recognition of the links between production, profitability, environment, and social considerations has illustrated the need for a broader perspective encompassing multiple goals. USDA needs a balanced portfolio of production, conservation, natural resource, rural development and environmental policies and well-defined, clearly linked goals and programs for conservation, environment, research, commodities, and marketing.

Poor communication and cooperation among USDA agencies can pose constraints to the systems-based approach that is critical for sustainable development. Moreover, multiple, uncoordinated Department programs that have direct or indirect effects on sustainability can conflict or have overlapping goals. Congressional appropriations by agency instead of function sometimes create real but unnecessary barriers between agencies within USDA.

Recommendations:

For immediate action:

A. Establish a USDA Council on Sustainable Development, comprised of representatives of appropriate agencies and mission areas, to coordinate USDA efforts in this arena, including agriculture, forestry, community development and other relevant areas. Its functions could include oversight of the implementation of the final Working Group recommendations and development of a USDA Strategic Plan for a Sustainable Future.

B. Promote sustainable agriculture within USDA agencies by directing agencies to conduct a program-by-program examination of barriers to sustainable agriculture and effect appropriate changes through their strategic plans, policy statements, handbooks, and when developing new rules and regulations, particularly during implementation of the 1996 Farm Bill.

C. Develop performance-based criteria and indicators to evaluate progress toward sustainable agriculture in policy, regulation, technical assistance and research priority-setting, with flexibility for site-specific adaptation and multi-disciplinary collaborations in problem-solving. These criteria should be linked to strategic plans and goals developed for GPRA and other relevant performance

measures. Support and participate with the Interagency Working Group on Sustainable Development Indicators to develop a framework for sustainable development, identify indicators of progress toward sustainable development, and share data and information regarding all aspects of sustainable development.

Need feasibility study:

D. Increase consumer and producer participation in agency policy making, research and extension committees, particularly individuals with experience in sustainable agriculture and other alternative practices. Executives who oversee nominations for USDA committees should be charged with ensuring the inclusion of such participation. Nominations should be solicited not only from traditional farming organizations such as the American Farm Bureau Federation, but also from groups such as the regional administrative councils of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program.

IV. Economic and Marketing Issues

Findings:

Economic viability lies at the core of sustainable agriculture. If farmers are not profitable, they will not be sustainable. Many farmers considering a move toward more sustainable practices are resistant for fear of a loss of yields, and consequently, profits. However, reports have suggested that, while yields may be initially lower for some crops, yields begin to return as soil productivity improves. Production costs can sometimes be decreased by replacing off-farm inputs with on-farm resources, such as using animal manure for crop fertilization, allowing fertilizer inputs to be reduced. Many times a premium price for organic products or other specially produced agricultural goods more than offsets any yield reductions that occur. In many cases, farmers are switching their strategies from maximizing production to optimizing inputs and increasing net profits.

New practices are often perceived to have greater risks because they differ from the accepted practice. Bankers and crop insurance agents are often averse to financing or providing coverage for practices that are novel and not widely practiced by local farmers. There is considerable anecdotal evidence from farmers who have been refused operating loans for non-conventional practices. Some crop insurance policies, like cotton, require a conventional spraying regimen in exchange for coverage. Economic performance data is needed to compare sustainable agriculture systems to conventional systems and to convince the banking community that sustainable agriculture can be economically viable. Crop yield and performance data are also necessary to develop crop insurance programs that will mitigate the risk in making the transition to non-conventional practices. In some cases, sustainable agriculture practices can actually reduce the risk of low yields. In these cases, policies could be rewritten with lower premiums.

Farmers who want to incorporate new crops in their planting rotations are sometimes reluctant if a ready market or marketing infrastructure does not exist to handle these new crops. For example, a local grain elevator that limits its services to corn and soybeans would often be unwilling to handle a new crop like canola or millet. Sustainable agriculture production systems will need to be supported by a marketing system that services a variety of crops.

At the same time, consumer demand is increasing for organic food, specialty foods, locally grown food, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) systems. Studies are needed to help farmers identify potential alternative markets, particularly locally owned, value-added marketing opportunities. Value-added processing can offer farming communities a source of new employment and lead to increased income in the community. Producers would benefit from economic and marketing studies to determine the costs and benefits of adopting sustainable production management systems.

Recommendations:

For immediate action:

A. Reduce economic disincentives to production systems that benefit the natural resource base, environment and community while maintaining efficient production by increasing government program (commodity, conservation, credit, insurance, etc.) flexibility.

B. Accelerate implementation of the National Organic Standards Program to formalize the definition of organic agriculture and set standards, as well as clarify marketing misinformation and misunderstandings about the nature of the program.

C. Develop and implement a plan to evaluate and disseminate findings on private and social benefits, as well as costs associated with agricultural production systems and how they influence the long-term economic, environmental and social sustainability of U.S. agriculture.

Need feasibility study:

D. Integrate the concept of diversification and value-added products in USDA programs, especially rural development programs, by offering financial and technical support to develop local enterprises that provide services, processing and marketing avenues for alternative crops and hence encourage the adoption of diversified and environmentally beneficial crop rotations.

E. Establish a pilot effort, called the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Learning Initiative, to provide pertinent information to banking institutions, the FCIC, crop insurance underwriters and USDA field staff. Projects would be awarded competitively to local consortiums of farmers, bankers, crop insurance underwriters and field agents where a substantial number of farmers are already using nonconventional crops and practices. These locations could be identified through existing networks of farmers and farm organizations already practicing sustainable agriculture.

F. Establish a competitive program of producer mini-grants and zero-interest loans for sustainable agriculture enterprises in several categories, such as: vegetable cropping, multiple use, value-added entrepreneurial enterprises, niche marketing or special purpose agricultural products.

G. Provide economic incentives and technical assistance to develop farm-level risk reduction strategies to support implementation of more sustainable production systems.

V. Research Issues

Findings:

Sustainable agriculture requires that production issues be considered within the context of social, economic and environmental impacts. This effort to include the deliberate consideration of social and environmental impacts of agriculture in USDA's research and education activities requires new approaches to priority-setting, funding and evaluation of the federal research system. The agricultural research community has developed well-accepted, effective methods and institutional strategies for solving problems using disciplinary research. However, it is clear that traditional disciplinary research methods are poorly suited to solving the complex problems that arise in considering the sustainability of agriculture. The challenge is to create a more flexible research system that can accommodate diverse research approaches using methods appropriate to specific problems.

Most research efforts have not focused on understanding and examining whole systems — such as ecosystem, whole-farm and watershed analysis approaches — or integration of multiple perspectives through interdisciplinary research. The tendency instead has been to focus on smaller components of plant and animal systems. Narrowly focused studies have provided useful information, but need to be better balanced by integrative systems studies. New approaches are needed to bring about research that successfully transcends disciplines. These new approaches may require institutional innovation, such as forming teams that can function in centers or institutes that evaluate scientists by their team contributions to problem-solving, rather than by the number of scientific articles published.

Another constraint identified is the lack of sufficient collaboration between researchers and clients (producers and others) in setting research agendas and designing research. In the programs that have involved producers more directly in priority-setting and program evaluation, there has been general agreement that producers are able to bring valuable insights to the research priority setting process. Producers often are identified as the true integrators in attempting to blend the economic, environmental, and social factors that influence sustainability.

Recommendations:

For immediate action:

A. Promote systems-based research and education efforts in sustainable agriculture by: 1) development of USDA-supported scholarships for post graduate research and education programs on sustainable agriculture (eg., directing some of USDA's National Needs Fellowship funds to sustainable agriculture); 2) continued support of the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program and other programs contributing to the achievement of sustainable agriculture goals; and, 3) establishment of awards programs to identify and reward university and Agricultural Research Service scientists who successfully incorporate creative, systems-oriented approaches in their research and education

programs.

B. Involve producers, especially those with sustainable agriculture expertise, in developing research priorities, making funding decisions, conducting research projects and implementing education efforts based on research results. This might include planning, conducting and evaluating research within the Agricultural Research Service and the National Research Initiative.

C. Examine use of current research reporting mechanisms, such as Current Research Information System (CRIS) for documenting sustainable agriculture research. Where CRIS or other systems are used in research evalua-

tion, such as in the Agricultural Research Service, consider the use of sustainable agriculture-relevant criteria in project planning and reporting.

D. Encourage agricultural scientists to include relevance to sustainable agriculture in their research activities, and encourage collaboration on interdisciplinary systems projects. Methods of stimulating such changes include: 1) expanding current grant programs to include agricultural systems and sustainable agriculture, allowing planning grants for systems projects within the National Research Initiative, and giving more weight to systems-oriented proposals in current grants programs; 2) in performance review, allowing for the longer start-up time, increased management effort and lengthy data collection needed for systems research and projects evaluating long-term sustainability ; and 3) crediting multiple authors equally on publications resulting from systems-oriented projects.

Need feasibility study:

E. Target specific interdisciplinary challenges facing agriculture with focused funding support, such as the research, development and policy barriers associated with diversifying agriculture and generating value-added approaches to rural economic development.

F. Fund new types of institutes or centers that allow interdisciplinary research and development with a focus on problem-solving, rather than a focus on publishing refereed journal articles. Such institutes or centers should be created with the flexibility to form the public-private partnerships needed to catalyze change in agriculture.

G. Expand sociological research to provide USDA programs with a better understanding of how and why producers make or adopt changes in their production systems.

VI. Communication and Outreach Issues

Findings

Lack of knowledge and misunderstanding may be at the heart of some of the reluctance to adopt or support more sustainable production systems. Cultural and social associations with nonconventional practices, and confusion about the relationship of the term “sustainable” to concepts like organic, low-input, or regenerative agriculture, similarly interfere with understanding. Some farmers and ranchers feel they are criticized for “non-sustainable” practices, when they already may be using practices, such as integrated pest management, rotational grazing, or no-till cultivation, that move in the direction of sustainability. These farmers and ranchers need to be applauded for the steps they have taken and encouraged to search for further means to make their operations more sustainable.

Access to information about the array of approaches in sustainable agriculture needs to be improved, along with encouraging a learning environment for all partners in the agricultural community. Sharing of information about sustainable agriculture is taking place mostly at the grassroots level, and is rarely institutionalized beyond farmers themselves. Although some of these practices are becoming more widely accepted, in many instances agency personnel, producers, agricultural consultants/advisors, lenders, and others are unaware of alternative strategies. Throughout the course of the meetings of the Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, producers repeatedly said they found it difficult to get information about improving the sustainability of their practices from USDA, or that USDA personnel were unreceptive to the experience-based information they and other producers were willing to share. Lack of widely available information about sustainability principles and approaches also was cited for the reluctance of lending institutions to extend credit to producers wishing to use these methods.

Recommendations

Immediate Steps:

A. Direct agencies that disseminate technical information to producers to encompass multiple options in publications and other presentations, such as including biological control methods when discussing pest management, renewable energy sources and energy efficiency in reviews of new equipment options, or rotational grazing when addressing options for improving feed efficiency.

B. Emphasize USDA’s role as a facilitator of information exchange among farmers, building upon existing information transfer programs to support greater horizontal information flow and two-way communication.

C. Build upon current efforts within the Sustainable Agriculture Network, the Alternative Farming Information Center and Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas to establish a sustainable agriculture

information hub coordinated through the National Agricultural Library. Use multiple media, including electronic, print, audio and visual, to collect and access information. Encourage communication and information transfer among all sectors of agriculture and geographical regions, including local, national and international agencies, nongovernmental organizations and educational institutions, in addition to USDA programs and initiatives. Instruct all USDA agencies to feed relevant information into the system, and to access the system to find information that relates to sustainable approaches. Promote the availability of this information source to the general public.

D. Identify examples of existing, successful Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities to showcase the integration of sustainable agriculture with local economies.

E. Initiate a broad-based public information campaign on sustainable agriculture aimed at both urban and rural populations and coordinated across all USDA agencies. Include components addressing the role of sustainable agriculture in increasing opportunities for farm supply businesses and enhancing the value of land and water resources. Improve the Department's ability to communicate about sustainable options with the general public, such as considering changing USDA's visual symbols to portray an image that supports sustainability.

F. Expand the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Professional Development Program, which currently covers extension and NRCS, to include FSA field staff and/or FSA District Directors. Training and professional development in this program should include information on new Farm Bill regulations and programs that allow greater opportunities for sustainable agriculture practices.

Need feasibility study:

G. Develop educational workshops targeted toward informing bankers and crop insurance underwriters about how sustainable agriculture practices can be a good investment.

H. Initiate a series of dialogues or forums at local, regional, and national levels for bringing together USDA program managers and producers who have embraced sustainable systems to discuss their efforts and identify barriers, opportunities, and new strategies.

I. Establish a sustainable agriculture coordinating position or office in each state, working with a multi-agency coordinating committee to gather, synthesize, and disseminate information on sustainable agriculture from diverse sources, including a USDA information hub. This would facilitate and build upon efforts already underway in many states, or initiate statewide coordination where it is absent. The primary purpose would be to identify priorities and coordinate resources to solve real problems identified by farmers, consultants, and other stakeholders. Contact among state coordinators also would help facilitate information-sharing among sustainable programs in different regions.

Appendix A: SAWG Members, Fall 1995

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Alanko, Jerry | Farm Service Agency |
| Backiel, Adela* ** | Office of the Chief Economist |
| Baron, Samantha | Office of Budget and Program Analysis |
| Baumes, Harry | Economic Research Service |
| Berc, Jeri | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Bomer Lauritsen, Sharon | Agricultural Marketing Service |
| Borst, Alan | Rural Business and Cooperative Development Service |
| Boyer, Bill | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Carey, Ann** | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Carnill, Greg* | Farm Service Agency |
| Carter, Tim | Farm Service Agency |
| Chilton, Bart | Rural Economics and Community Development |
| Clark, Andy | National Agricultural Library (ARS) |
| Denley, Tim | Farm Service Agency |
| Dittrich, Suzie | Federal Crop Insurance Corporation |
| Doetzer, Denise | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Duesterhaus, Rich | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Evans, Gary | Global Change Program Office |
| Fitzner, Michael | Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service |
| Fontenot, Wildon | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Fowler, Jerry | Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service |
| Frost, Jack | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Gates, Jane | National Agricultural Library (ARS) |
| Gelburd, Diane | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Gershuny, Grace** | Agricultural Marketing Service |
| Hammond, Jerry | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Hefferan, Colien** | Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service |
| Herndon, Lee | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Hestvik, Sharon | Farm Service Agency |
| Jones, Julia** | Global Change Program |
| Kelly, Maureen* | Research, Education and Extension |
| Kemper, Doral | Agricultural Research Service |
| Kollstedt, Mary | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Langley, James | Cooperative Farm Service Agency |
| Lauster, Ron | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Lawrence, Douglas | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Lengnick, Laura* | Agricultural Research Service |
| Lessard, Gene | Forest Service |
| Lewis, David | Rural Business and Cooperative Development Service |
| Margheim, Gary | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| McWilliams, Ruth | Forest Service |
| Meister, Barbara* ** | Research, Education and Extension |
| Molleur, Robert** | Farm Service Agency |
| Murrell, Darwin | Agricultural Research Service |
| Myers, Rob* ** | Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service |
| Nordstrom, Gary | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| O'Brien, Tom* | Agricultural Marketing Service |
| Preston, Beverly | Farm Service Agency |
| Ricker, Hal | Agricultural Marketing Service |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Rives, Sam | National Agricultural Statistics Service |
| Robinson, Bob | Economic Research Service |
| Ruark, Greg** | Forest Service |
| Safley, Marc* | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Schertz, David | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| van Schilfgaarde, Jan | Agricultural Research Service |
| Setia, Parveen** | Economic Research Service |
| Shackelford, Parks | Farm Service Agency |
| St. John, Judith | Agricultural Research Service |
| Stommes, Eileen | Agricultural Marketing Service |
| Swader, Fred | Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service |
| Weber, Thomas | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Wetherill, Rick | Rural Economics and Community Development |
| Wright, Lloyd | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| Wyatt, Mark | Rural Business and Cooperative Development Service |

* Planning team member (facilitated by Barbara Meister)

**Writing committee member (facilitated by Rob Myers)

Additional credits: Valerie Berton assisted with writing, editing and formatting of the report. Kirsten Fehrenkamp assisted with organizing the Working Group schedule and events. Theresa McNeal and Elaine Hauhn assisted with meeting organization and communication.

Appendix B: SAWG Meeting Schedule

Session 1: September 8, 1995

Topics:

- Orientation
 - Concepts and Approaches to Sustainable Agriculture
 - Charge to Working Group presented by Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger
- Resource persons: University, nonprofit and producer speakers

Session 2: September 22, 1995

Topic: Farm tours in Maryland

Session 3: October 6, 1995

Topic: Barriers to changes in farm practices

Resource persons: Producer panel

Session 4: October 20, 1995

Topic: Constraints in current federal programs

Resource persons: Field staff from NRCS, FSA, ES and ATTRA

Session 5: November 3, 1995

Topic: Public expectations for agriculture

Resource persons: Consumer perspectives

Session 6: November 17, 1995

Topics:

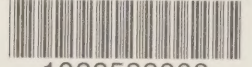
- Developing action plans to overcome barriers to sustainable agriculture
- Formation of subcommittees

Session 7: December 8, 1995

Topic: Reports of Working Group subcommittees

January 22, 1996: Presentation of report to Deputy Secretary, Subcabinet and Agency Administrators

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